

Denial of Uniquely Human Characteristics for Voluntarily Childfree Individuals: Does Violating Social Norms Lead to Dehumanization?

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Nationally representative data consistently show that an increasing number of individuals are choosing not to have children (*Time*, 2013). Despite this trend, people who opt out of parenthood experience negativity (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). A recent study furthermore revealed that this negativity was driven by moral outrage (Ashburn-Nardo, in press). Research on dehumanization includes moral sensibility as a characteristic of being human (Haslam, 2006). If those who forgo parenthood elicit moral outrage, it is possible that they are also seen as being less than human. The present research investigates the potential for dehumanization to occur in the form of denying uniquely human characteristics to voluntarily childfree individuals. In a between-subjects experiment, N participants were randomly assigned to evaluate a male vs. female married target who had chosen to have 0 vs. 2 children. They were then asked to rate the likelihood that the target was capable of experiencing uniquely human emotions (e.g., admiration, despair), as well as the likelihood that essential human traits (e.g., warm, irresponsible) and characteristics (e.g., rational, culturally refined) described the target. Statistical analyses are currently underway and are expected to reveal that, relative to targets who have children, targets that chose not to have children will be rated significantly less likely to experience uniquely human secondary emotions, to have complex cognitions and to have uniquely human traits. Target gender will be explored as a potential moderator of these effects. Historically, dehumanization has led to dangerous outcomes for targets. The present findings could suggest that a significant and growing portion of the population could be subject to discrimination in social and workplace situations.